WESTMORELAND RESOURCES'

S
622.33
L3ar
1983

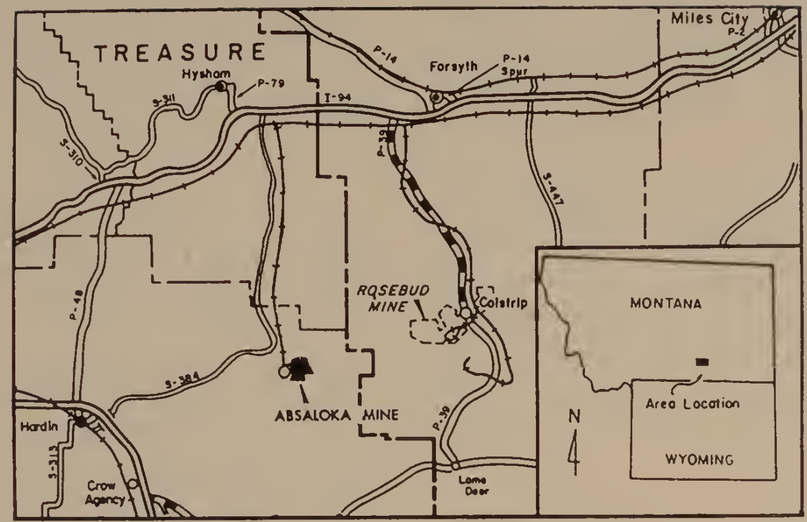
Absaloka Mine

PLEASE RETURN
STATE DOCUMENTS COLLECTION
DEC 1 0 1984
MONTANA STATE LIBRARY
1515 E. 6th AVE.
HELENA, MONTANA 59620

Revised Plan

THE MINE TODAY

Westmoreland Resources unearths about 4 million tons of coal each year from the 2,417-acre Absaloka Mine in southeastern Montana. The company's draglines uncover the coal, which is shipped by rail to coal-fired electric generating plants in the northern Midwest. Owing to the soft coal market, the company recently revised its future mine plan.



The Absaloka Mine lies 26 miles east of Hardin, Montana on the eastern border of Big Horn County.

WHY THIS BROCHURE

The revised plan must be reviewed by both the Montana Department of State Lands and the U.S. Office of Surface Mining, the two agencies that prepared this brochure.

Before the review, the agencies want to know what worries or concerns you have about the continued easterly expansion of Westmoreland's mine.

THE LAW REQUIRES AN ANALYSIS

The finding of the Department of State Lands and the Office of Surface Mining, the government agencies that regulate mining in the state of Montana, is that Westmoreland Resources' revised plan may "significantly affect the quality of the human environment."

Because of this finding, the agencies must prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS), as required by two laws--the Montana (1971) and National (1969) Environmental Policy Acts.

The draft of the EIS will be prepared soon. Contained in the document will be a complete analysis of the revised plan--what will happen to people, the environment, businesses, and government if the plan goes ahead.

Topics in both the natural sciences--water quality, wildlife, soils, air quality--and in the social sciences--employment, income, social conditions, community services--appear in the EIS.

What we would like from you is a list of the issues and concerns you feel are important.

ABOUT THE REVISED PLAN

The revised plan calls for two changes from the plan now on the books. The first is a change in the sequence and timing of mining over the next twelve years. The second change would enlarge the entire area scheduled for mining, an area that would be worked until 2017, the year the mine would close.

The Mine Expands

The revised plan would, over the next twelve years, expand the mine area by 629 acres, 573 of which would be mined or significantly disturbed. The long-term plan would expand the mined area by about another 2,246 acres, bringing the total mine area to over 5,000 acres.

All lands to be mined lie between the main fork and East Fork of Sarpy Creek. Over the life of the mine, the company would eventually extend its mine permit boundary to as close as one-quarter mile from the East Fork.

Westmoreland has designed the mine to produce 10 million tons of coal per year. The mine now produces about 4 million tons per year, although the new plan calls for production of an average 5 millions tons per year until 1995 and 10 million yearly thereafter.

284 Million Tons of Coal

Recoverable coal reserves remaining at the Absaloka Mine total about 284 million tons, all leased from the Crow Tribe of Indians. The reserves are contained in four seams. Two seams, the Stray 1 and Stray 2, cannot usually be recovered or sold.

Westmoreland's primary objective is the Rosebud-McKay and Robinson coal seams. The Rosebud-McKay is 30 to 35 feet thick and the Robinson 17 to 23 feet thick.

No New Facilities

In the revised plan, Westmoreland proposes to continue with the facilities now used. Coal-processing structures include crushers, a train-loading station, and a coal storage barn. Other facilities include an office, shop, boiler house, explosive storage silo, and service and repair buildings.

Coal to be Stripped

The Absaloka Mine is an area strip mine, where the dragline advances by excavating a succession of long, narrow pits, one alongside the next. The unwanted material that is stripped to make one pit is cast back into the preceding pit, from which the coal has been taken. In this way, only a tiny fraction of the total mine area is actually cut by a pit at one time.

Mining first begins when scrapers strip the topsoil and subsoil from the surface. Only then does the company blast and excavate the unwanted rock strata, called overburden, lying over the coal. The coal is blasted in turn and lifted by power shovels into dump trucks. The trucks haul the coal from the pit to the dump station.

Today, the mine employs about 125 workers. Assuming the coal market rises from the current slump, mine employment would rise along with increasing coal production to as high as 265 by 1992.

Reclaiming the Land

Once the coal is taken from the pit, reclamation begins, first with the casting of overburden back into the hole. Bulldozers then contour the surface to about the premining shape. Scrapers replace the topsoil. Then the area is seeded.

Following several years, allowed for plants to sprout and mature, the reclaimed lands are returned to the premining land use--livestock grazing. To date, 300 acres have been reclaimed.

HOW THE LAW WORKS

The draft EIS is only the first part of a process. After publishing the draft, environmental laws require the Department and the Office of Surface Mining to ask for comments and, if the comments warrant further consideration, prepare a final, improved EIS.

The purpose of the EIS is mostly to provide a forum for comment on the agencies' analysis. The EIS doesn't lay out how mining will be regulated. It doesn't determine whether a company can or can't mine.

The value of the EIS is that it lets you look at a company's plan in detail, see for yourself what the future holds. If, in the draft, you see something wrong, you have a say. Write or call us. Help make sure the EIS gives the facts straight, is thorough, tells all.

We'll make changes and put them in the final EIS. You'll have 60 days after the draft to send us your thoughts.

When the final EIS is published, our analysis is done. Based on that analysis, and on the review of other scientists, the Department and the Office of Surface Mining will make a decision on if, and how, to issue the permit for Westmoreland's plan.

What you say counts.

THE ISSUES

The EIS will cover a variety of topics. Among them:

- o surface and ground water
- o soil and rootzone overburden quality
- o landscape stability
- o freshwater ecology
- o air quality
- o employment and population
- o Crow Tribe of Indians
- o community services (schools, fire and police protection, local government, etc.)
- o local and state revenues, especially pertaining to the Crow Tribe's challenge to the severance tax
- o reclamation of ponderosa pine and creek-bottom plants
- o deer, sharp-tailed grouse, and turkey populations
- o social conditions
- o land uses
- o recreation demands
- o archeological and historical sites
- o springs, especially pertaining to livestock grazing and wildlife

---------- cut here ----------

YOUR CONCERNS

The Department of State Lands and the Office of Surface Mining would like to hear whatever additional concerns you have. Fill in the blanks to the right with the issues you think should be covered in the EIS.

Name _____

Address _____

_____

Phone _____
(If you would like us to call you about any issue.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Send this cutout by September 16, 1983, to the Montana Department of State Lands, Environmental Analysis Bureau, Capitol Station, Helena, MT 59620. Or, if you would like to call us, telephone 449-2711, in Helena.

mt
83-209
SOC

THE PLAN HAS BEEN REVISED ...

... WHAT ARE YOUR CONCERNS?

Montana Department of State Lands
Environmental Analysis Bureau
1539 11th Ave.
Helena, MT 59620